

TWO COMMUNICATIONS

GOLDWYN vs. THURBER

Producer and Author dispute over "Walter Mitty"

In response to an review of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* in the issue of Aug. 6, LIFE has received the following letters from Producer Samuel Goldwyn and Author James Thurber.

Sir:

I am delighted that you chose my production of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* as the "Movie of the Week" in your Aug. 4 issue and that you consider Mitty's dream life to be "highly entertaining" since this is a picture which is designed for entertainment. I was, however, somewhat startled at your statement that Jim Thurber "grows almost positive when he thinks of how his story has been corrupted." Either Mr. Thurber has been misquoted or Jim in the past year does as complete a switch as ever Walter Mitty did from real life to dream world.

As I could not tell you, the original story, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," is a pure gem, which added great beauty to the little magazine in which it was first published. However, in order to convert such a gem into a feature length motion picture it is necessary first to elaborate it into a screenplay.

I must confess that in the preparation of the screenplay I departed quite completely from traditional Hollywood policy by consistently consulting the author of the story itself, Ken Englund, one of the co-authors of the screenplay, made a special trip to New York to get from Mr. Thurber his ideas as to how the screenplay should be handled. I, of course, was only too happy to get Mr. Thurber's ideas and to pay him for them. After they had finished, Mr. Thurber wrote me a long letter in which he detailed his delight at the way the story was handled. Let me quote:

"It was a great pleasure to work with a man as intelligent and skilled as Ken Englund and I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to do so. It isn't often that I meet a man whose ideas and whose sense of story so beautifully coincide with my own."

That hardly leads me to believe that Jim Thurber thinks that his story is being translated to the screen has been corrupted.

And when it appears from your review that Mitty's real life adventures are as exciting as to bring about a result as which "the delicate point of Thurber's story is lost," all I can say is that Jim Thurber and in that same letter:

"The melodrama still remains the spine of my reaction, but I had kind words from Ken Englund, that it no longer sticks out, but that it has been ingeniously increased with the dramatic and the private life of our hero."

At that time, at least, Jim Thurber knew that there was a lot to learn in translating a story to the screen, for he concluded that letter by writing:

"I feel that I have learned a great deal in a short time about some of the problems that face a motion picture producer and a motion picture writer. Let me thank you again for allowing Ken Englund to work with me on this story and let me say once more that I am enthusiastic about this picture."

This statement would not be complete, however, if I were not to add that on March 13, 1946, just before we were to start shooting, we sent Mr. Thurber a copy of the shooting script, telling him "we would be delighted and grateful to have any suggestion or idea you may have on the script." On March 15, 1946, we received the following telegram, "writing me back letter yesterday a few more suggestions BUT NO MAJOR CHANGES AS SCRIPT ALREADY IN ELABORATE SCRIPT PHASE."

And finally, on April 2nd, Mr. Thurber wrote us, "Don't think that I feel in motion how difficult it is going to be to follow Walter Mitty with something as good."

James Thurber is much too free a man to be satisfied with anything but his own words. That is why I have quoted so extensively from what he, himself, has actually said about the way we handled his story.

And now—the Mitty. The Undiscovered and a rapid, flowing, sparkling playing about my lips. I have the feeling of your interest and amazement; clever and mysterious, grand and disdained, incredible to the last.

SAMUEL GOLDWYN

Hollywood, Calif.

Sir:

I wonder why Samuel Goldwyn, Inc., artist, motion picture, just thought not, good news, because it is the reporters and commentators of LIFE who have been looking across the wall. The challenge is for me, and I gladly accept it, in spite of my opponent's choice of that obsolete weapon of controversy, the example below.

On or about Nov. 25, 1945, Mr. Goldwyn brought to New York a completed 100-page script of "Mitty" by Everett Freeman and Ken Englund. Creative writer had begun Jan. 2, 1946, and in the ensuing two months several story treatments and a screen play were prepared by Mr. Goldwyn. Mr. Freeman alone for a few weeks, then with Miss Constance Franklin for a week or so, and from then on with Mr. Englund, developed the story line. During this vital period my personal criticism, and collaboration were never once sought.

I was confronted by a situation that was completely uncharacteristic for me: Walter, an absolutely new and different story line was called for. Just the shooting script, the budget, and the few days allotted to me would not permit of this. The entire exposure of Mr. Goldwyn's, as far as my inability to comprehend the problems of writing. He told me the last sixty pages were all right and asked

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...take 5"

Here's Elmer Nutton on vacation
With his pipe and Revelation.
Man, it's great to be alive
When you sit back, relax, take five.



...take Revelation!

Altho' there's no law, don't burning tobacco as skiffily blended with fragrant fire-burning leaf. Yes, popularly grown Revelation smokes so cool, so smooth, so steady, more and more pipe smokers "take 5" every day—just for the pleasure of it!

Take 5! Take Bailey for body, Carleton for color, Virginia for vigor, Louisiana for lucidness and Persimmon for pliancy.

"...take 5"
glorious tobacco
in one great



Made by the special PHILIP MORRIS process



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